

THE MARTYR ON MARTYRS

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The theme song of Bhagat Singh's writings on earlier martyrs was their noble ideals and the indomitable spirit which made them bear untold sufferings while making the supreme sacrifice of life.

In a letter to 'Modern Review', Calcutta, in retort to an article in the magazine ridiculing their slogan of 'Long Live Revolution', Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt, had cited the instance of their slogan, 'Long Live Jatin Das' to clarify their viewpoint, which read:

"For instance when we shout 'Long Live Jatin Das' we cannot and do not mean thereby that Das should physically be alive. What we mean by that should is that the noble *ideal* of his life, the indomitable *spirit* which enabled that great martyr to bear such untold sufferings and to make the extreme sacrifice for the *ideal* should ever live. By raising this cry we wish that we may show the same unfailing courage in pursuance of *our ideal*. It is that *spirit* that we allude to." (Italics mine)

The emphasis on the two words ideals, and spirit constitute the kernel of Bhagat Singh's writings on the earlier martyrs. That Bhagat Singh did not mean 'ideology' while using the word 'ideal' is writ large, even in his choice of the heroes he dwelt upon. These heroes included Kukas, Babbar Akalis, Madan Lal Dhingra who were staunch devotees of their respective religions on the one hand, the Hindustan Republican Association martyrs like Bismil, Ashfaq, an organisation of which Bhagat Singh remained an active member for three to four years till the formation of H.S.R.A. on the other, with *Ghadrites* of 1914-15 including his idol Kartar Singh being in the middle of the continuum. It is hard to discern any element of bias or preference in Bhagat Singh's treatment of these heroes in the time order of his write ups, the amount of diligence displayed in marshalling of facts about each of them, or for that matter in the verve, passion or reverence with which he dealt with any one of them.

Indeed, Bhagat Singh never undertook to attempt any write up without having done a thorough spade work as regarding the personal

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life, deeds and words of the martyr thereby taking *holistic* view of the individual, in totality. A practical illustration in this direction is his having managed to procure two copies of historic judgements, the first regarding the trial of *Ghadrites* of 1914-15 by the Special Tribunal, and the other pertaining to trial of *Babbar Akalis* during 1925-26. It could have been possible only by a jugglers' trick, since it would be a Herculean task even now to do so. Besides, the profuse marginal notes and the extensive underlining in the hands of Bhagat Singh on these manuscripts extending to 392 and 230 full scape printed pages respectively, testifies to the kind of minute attention having been invested therein. Both these documents are exhibited in Museum at Khatkar Kalan from where this writer obtained the photocopies to publish them in book form.

As for the present writers on Bhagat Singh, most of them try their hand on him alone. They highlight his ideology while treating the other aspects of his life as poor cousins.

Further, a letter of Bhagat Singh dated 27th February 1928 to the editor of Hindi monthly *Maharathi* alludes to his belief that "the significance of these writings (on martyrs) is considerably lost in the absence of a portrait." Also care was taken while celebrating martyrs' days to project their portraits with the aid of a magic lantern.

Obviously, very little attention is paid to this dimension while writing on Bhagat Singh.

The concluding lines of the said letter read as follows:

"The articles (on martyrs) had already been written but (myself) being busy in organising 'Martyrs Day' during the 'National Week'. I may not be able to send the same to you, for which I beg to be excused. I will try to send the first write-up this week..."

Just a cursory perusal of the above lines makes it evident that for Bhagat Singh, writing on martyrs was his 'way of life', not in any way occasioned by any centenary or jubilee, which often triggers the present writings on him.

In terms of sheer magnitude, he wrote numerous articles mostly in *Kirti* in Punjabi, and sometimes in Hindi journals and papers, most of which were eventually compiled in a landmark publication by H.S.R.A., *Chand: Phansi Ank* — Nov. 1928, which was instantly banned by the Government. How Bhagat Singh could find *time* for such a time consuming pursuit in the midst of his *ubiquity*, the hectic activities of *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*, H.S.R.A., besides his vast amount of reading revolutionary literature and fiction, is nothing less than a puzzle.

At the conceptual plane these writings may be viewed as an endeavour by him to discover and share with his readers, his vision of the pristine, universal Martyr.

At the spiritual level, he could be vicariously experiencing their sublime ecstasy, while empathising with them thereby fortifying his own resolve to steadfastly pursue his ideals as a pilgrim of life.

Above all, the style of Bhagat Singh is direct, conversational, without any literary embellishment, though not without literary merit, as far as this writer can perceive.

While concluding, the last lines of a Bengali poem by eminent poet Qazi Nazrul Islam, cited by Bhagat Singh in his write up on Madan Lal Dhingra are reproduced below:

'Me the rebel feels war weary, I shall rest,
When no cry of the suffering beings rends the sky.
None shall whine in agony and the bloodthirsty dagger of cruel
oppressors,
Shall cease to pierce the innocent;
Nay, would vanish.
Then and then only I shall rest in peace.'

(English translation mine)
